

Lesson 7 Isaiah 7:1-8:8 The Word to Judah I

Introduction

Isaiah <small>"He will lift up a standard for the nations...he will set a sign among the peoples."</small>			
Book of the King 1-39			
The Triumph of Grace 6-12			
Prologue: Reconciliation and Commission 6 The death of the king (1a) Responding to the divine holiness (1b-7) Responding to the divine concern (8-10) Responding to the divine purpose (11-13a) The oak tree cut down and life remains (13b)	The King and His People 7-11		Epilogue: Salvation, Joy and Proclamation 12 The prophet addresses an individual (1-2) The prophet addresses the community (3-5)
	The Word to Judah 7:1-9:7(6) The moment of decision (7:1-17) The judgment (7:18-8:8) The remnant (8:9-22) The glorious Hope (9:1-7) {8:23-9:6}	The Word to Israel 9:8(7)-11:16 The moment of decision (9:8-10:4) The judgment (10:5-15) The remnant (10:16-34) The glorious hope (11:1-16)	

Alec Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?"

I think the key to this chapter is in recognizing we are not just talking about Ahaz and the failure of a faith test. We are talking about the house of David and whether God's promises to David and Judah have any hope of success among such a faithless people. The king and his people are connected to one another. The people of the northern kingdom Israel have rejected the house of David. Isaiah has a prophetic word for those who are in Israel. Their end is very near. First, he has a word for Judah. Both prophetic messages follow the same pattern. The word for Judah addresses a moment of decision, a judgment, a remnant, and a glorious hope. The word for Israel addresses the same, a moment of decision, a judgment, a remnant, and a glorious hope.

Chapter 5 suggested the failure of God's grace to Judah. They are like a well-tended vineyard that has received protection and provision but yields a harvest of stink-fruit. God's judgment was declared through a series of six woes, at the end of which God whistled for a distant nation to come and take His people into exile. Chapter 5 ends in deep gloom. Chapters 6-12 do not alleviate our fears for Judah. Even so, we see a light arise. Grace does triumph for a remnant. In chapter 6 we saw atoning grace applied to Isaiah. His sin was removed. And he was invited into a missional relationship with God. At the end of our section, in chapter 12, we will encounter a proclamation of joy and salvation. In between the prologue of chapter 6 and the epilogue of chapter 12, we encounter these two words, one to Judah and one to Israel. We see here judgment. But we also see hope.

In this lesson we will address the first half of the word to Judah, which includes a moment of decision and a judgment. We will take these two parts in turn, starting with the moment of decision in Isaiah 7:1-17.

Moment of Decision (7:1-17)

¹ Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. ² When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

That can get a little confusing. Let me explain who we have here before we keep going. We have a series of three names: three people and three places. All three people are kings. All three places are regional neighbors. The first name is Ahaz. He is the current king of Judah. His father was Jotham. We have skipped over his reign. His grandfather was Uzziah, the leper king whose death was reported in 6:1. Next we have Rezin the king of Aram. Aram is north of Israel. Its capital is Damascus. The third name is Pekah the king of Israel. Sometimes Isaiah calls him "Pekah the son of Remaliah." Sometimes

Isaiah does not even bother with his name and just calls him “son of Remaliah.” To add to the confusion, we encounter here a reference to Ephraim. The first king of Israel came from the tribe of Ephraim. Ephraim was a son of Joseph. Jacob places his hands on the head of Ephraim at the end of Genesis, conferring on him the blessing of the firstborn. But the prophecies at the end of Genesis declare that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah.” Through Old Testament history we see these tribes paired together, sometimes positively as with Joshua and Caleb, but also negatively as with Jeroboam of Ephraim who leads the northern kingdom in its breakaway from Rehoboam, Solomon’s son. So, when you read “Ephraim” in the prophets, it is usually another way of referring to the kingdom of Israel. And that might be included here but Ephraim was also the tribe whose land was right across the border from Judah. So, if these kings are gathering their forces in Ephraim, it means they are gathering them on the border.

So for our present story, we have this series of names: Ahaz, Rezin, and Pekah - King of Judah, King of Aram, King of Israel, whose capital cities are Jerusalem, Damascus, and Samaria. Ahaz of Judah rules from Jerusalem; Rezin of Aram rules from Damascus; and Pekah of Israel rules from Samaria. We also get our first reference in this passage to the house of David. That might not catch our attention at first, but it does become important. This story is not mainly about Rezin or Pekah. This story is about Ahaz of the house of David. Even though the kings of the North have gone through several different dynasties in their leaders, the house of David has always ruled in the South. We have always had a descendant of David.

The two kings Rezin and Pekah have made an alliance against Judah. And “When it was reported to the house of David, saying, ‘The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,’ his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.” Along with his people, Ahaz is afraid. At the end of chapter 6 the king was like “an oak tree cut down.” Here, the king and his people are “a forest shaking in the wind.” That way of linking the two passages together with a word or phrase is the kind of artistic touch we see throughout Isaiah.

Alright, that’s the set-up. Let’s keep going, verses 3-17.

³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller’s field, ⁴ and say to him, ‘Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah.

⁵ ‘Because Aram, *with* Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, ⁶ “Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,”

⁷ thus says the Lord GOD:

⁸ “For the head of Aram is Damascus
(now within another 65 years

⁹ and the head of Ephraim is Samaria
If you will not believe,

“It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.

and the head of Damascus is Rezin
Ephraim as a people will be shattered)

and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
you surely shall not last.” ’ ”

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”

¹³ Then he said, “Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴ “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. ¹⁵ “He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good. ¹⁶ “For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. ¹⁷ “The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father’s house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.”

God has in mind a test of faith for Ahaz. Isaiah serves as God's spokesman. He is given some pretty nice directions; where to go, to the pool and the fullers' highway. He is told to take his son with him and go meet Ahaz, who is apparently inspecting a water source prior to the possibility of invasion from the North. The presence of Isaiah's son helps tie together the whole passage that is this word to Judah. We have Isaiah's son in verse 3, a son named Immanuel in verse 14 (that's awesome!), and a second son of Isaiah later in 8:3. Isaiah has named his son, "Shear-jashub," which means, "a remnant shall return." That name expressed two aspects of the message God entrusted to Isaiah. Judgment is implicit in the idea of return. Return from what? Well, from exile. Hope is communicated through belief that some will survive the exile, that there will be a remnant.

God's message to Ahaz here begins with a bit of trash talk against the two kings Rezin and Pekah. "Don't be afraid of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands just because they burn with anger." My Bible says the anger of these two kings is "fierce." In the Hebrew it is literally "fiery anger." They may be fiery in their anger, but God says they are smoldering stubs. Do not fear them.

The theme here is faith. The message is similar to the one God gave Joshua when he prepared to enter the Promised Land. "Do not be afraid. Be strong and courageous." Trust God, Ahaz! Do not fear what these two men plan to do.

This test is serious. There is real danger. These nations are of comparable size. And two of them have now teamed up against the one. And they are not planning a simple hit-and-run raid into Judah. They plan to breach the walls of Jerusalem and set up some puppet king named, Tabeel. They plan to overthrow the house of David. That is a mistake on the part of Israel. God might allow a raid against His wicked people Judah. A plan to remove David from the throne of Jerusalem, however, is an attack on the promises of God. This test of faith calls on Ahaz to remember who he is and to remember who God is, and to remember the promises to the house of David.

There is a chiasmic structure to God's words in verses 7-9. The outer lines, that is the first line and the last line, parallel one another in thought. Then the inner lines parallel one another. And we have a final line alone in the middle. The first outer line communicates a definitive word from God about this conspiracy to remove the house of David from leadership over Judah.

⁷ thus says the Lord GOD: It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.

I think this is where Gandalf got his famous phrase from, "You shall not pass!" That's all I can think about. It shall not stand. It shall not come to pass. That's good news. But it does not guarantee security for Ahaz, because the last line declares,

^{9b} If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.

That line is not definitive. It is conditional. Ahaz's position depends on his faith. Aram and Israel will fail. But Judah is not safe. Another judgment may fall on them if Ahaz refuses to believe God. The two inner lines simply define who the conspirators are.

^{8a} "For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin
^{9a} and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

The central line ignores Aram and declares the fate of Israel, the Northern Kingdom.

^{8b} (now within another 65 years Ephraim as a people will be shattered)

That is not a conditional word. That is a definitive word. Ephraim will be shattered. Sometimes prophecy is precise ("in 65 years"). But it's not always easy to know what it is being precise about. Further to the North, past Aram, the growing empire of Assyria is preparing to pounce, first on Aram as it moves South, and then on Israel. The Assyrian siege of Damascus began in 734 BC. If this year is prior to that, if this is 735 BC, the 65-year span of time mentioned here is from 735 BC to 670 BC. That seems to miss the fact that Israel was overrun, Samaria destroyed, and the people carried off to exile in 722 BC. That would be in 13 years, not 65 years. Though something significant did happen at the end of the 65 years. Esarhaddon, the next king of Assyria, imported foreign settlers into Israel. The poor Jewish remnant that had remained in the land intermarried with these foreign settlers and eventually

took on new religious customs. That's why in Jesus' day the people of this region, the Samaritans, were not recognized as fellow Jews. We cannot know for sure without asking God for an explanation, but when we recognize that the removal of Jews from northern Israel included both an exile of Jews out and an importation of foreign peoples in, then the 65-year time frame works out rather well.

To summarize what we have here, Aram and Israel planned to overthrow Judah. God, however, communicated to Ahaz that He would protect Judah and overthrow the two attacking kingdoms. Judah would be protected now. And the further security of Judah would depend on a response of faith from Ahaz. This is the moment of decision. Isaiah has set before Ahaz a test of faith. He has received a message that he can choose to believe Him or not. Isaiah provides him with a way to show his faith by asking for a sign. Listen to the test again, because at first we might think Ahaz is responding appropriately.

Test

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!"

Do you hear Ahaz? "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" What is he saying? That could be a sincere faith response. Jesus rebuked Satan with similar words from Deuteronomy, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16)." But that's not what is going on here. We can tell from Isaiah's response. He is going to say, "Would you try the patience of God?" This is a test of faith to Ahaz but Ahaz ends up testing God. This can be tricky when we interpret Biblical narrative. People say and do things that could reflect faith or faithlessness. It depends on what is going on inside of them, and we are often not told that in the narrative. Instead, we are supposed to pick up information on their internal state from the response of God or from the consequences of their actions. Isaiah's immediate rebuke of Ahaz reveals to us the state of heart. You might even notice that, when Isaiah first communicated to Ahaz, he said, "Ask your God for a sign." But then, when Isaiah rebukes him he says, "Would you try my God?" Ahaz is not showing that God is his God. Isaiah sees right through his false humility. "Far be it from me to test God."

That's a cop out. That's what that is. If we were to go read 2 Kings 16, we would see the corruption of Ahaz's spirit. He already knows what he is going to do. In fact, he has already done it. He has sent a messenger to Tiglath-Pileser, inviting the Assyrian king to attack Aram and Israel. Ahaz does not want to hear what Isaiah has to say. He does not want to open himself up for a word from God that will go contrary to the foreign policy he has already chosen. He also does not want to look like he is rejecting Yahweh. His "far be it from me to test God" is a smoke screen to make him appear faithful while he follows his own strategy. He is not praying over this.

Following the plans of his own heart, he will go from bad to worse. He rejects this offer from Isaiah, God's messenger. In a year's time, Tiglath-Pileser will defeat Aram and will march into Damascus and will set up an ornate altar to an Assyrian god. Ahaz will become so enamored with the power and pageantry of the victors that he will order a copy made of that altar to be placed in Yahweh's Temple in Jerusalem. He will move God's bronze altar to the side. And he will himself consecrate this new, better, more, I don't know, technologically, spiritually advanced altar himself. He will sacrifice in the Temple. And this is the way, when we grow up in a culture and we have this traditional religion that we just kind of, sort of play with but we are not really sincere about it. That is going to give way to a more dominant or popular cultural expressions of spirituality. What's the spirituality that really works in life? What's the spirituality here of military victory? Ahaz rejects the word of God to become a spiritual innovator.

That is all going to happen later. We have to go to 2 Kings to read it. What Isaiah is telling us about here is the moment of decision. Ahaz was given a choice. He chose to refuse God's offer.

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?"

God was not asking Ahaz to give up his reign to the prophet Isaiah. Faith does not mean simple, blind obedience without thought or question. Faith does, however, require an attitude of simple trust. Ahaz refused to trust.

I do not want to make light of the difficulty of Ahaz's position. I will never come close to leading a nation. And I will never have a task anywhere near as challenging as developing foreign policy in the Middle East. I think the significance of Ahaz's position is highlighted by the fact that God sent Isaiah to him. God raised up a prophet to speak His words directly to Ahaz precisely because of the significance of his spiritual leadership as a son of David bound up in difficult times.

I know that I will never approach this level of responsibility. I am struck, however, by the basic attitude God requires from Ahaz. The basic response of faith is true for all of us no matter what level of spiritual leadership or influence we are called to perform. We all start the same. Whether you are called to lead a Bible study, lead as a Mom or Dad at home, lead a task or committee at work, lead in worship, lead in government, whatever the environment, whatever the scope the beginning of wisdom for whatever faces you, whatever is immediately in front of you, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Ecclesiastes 12:13). That's in Proverbs, that's in Job, that's in Ecclesiastes. That's the wisdom literature. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. And we saw this in Isaiah. We start with a vision of God. And when we are overwhelmed by who God really is, then that pulls out a response. Isaiah's experience works for all of us. God asks, "Who shall I send?" We who believe respond, "Here am I. Send me! Now, where did you say we are going?"

Whatever the job, whatever the mission, that's always the first step with God. We express our trust, our dependence on Him. This does not mean that God is going to take over and do everything for us and make all the decisions. It does not mean we stop planning, stop using our mind and expertise. God expects His servants to give what they have to the task: their gifts, their knowledge, their experiences. Faith does not equal irresponsibility. Faith does not remove the spiritual leader from the equation. Faith does not take away hard work. Ahaz has been invited to focus on God. In the midst of this scary, challenging situation, take a deep breath, remember who you are as son of David, remember who God is - King over all nations - and express your dependence on Him. God wants to reassure you in this, Ahaz. God didn't even wait for you to come to Him. God sent Isaiah to you. Ask for a sign, so that you might be fully reassured that God stands for you against these invading kings. Ahaz refused the offer. God gave a sign anyway. Verses 14-17.

Sign

¹⁴ "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. ¹⁵ "He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good. ¹⁶ "For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. ¹⁷ "The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria."

A faith sign communicates something true about who God is. Sometimes miracles serve as signs that affirm the word of God. God gave Moses that kind of sign when He turned his staff into a serpent. Jesus' healing of a blind man was called a sign, not only because the sign confirmed the word of Jesus, but also because the sign itself communicated that Jesus is the source of truth, the light of the world who enables true sight. A sign can also stand as a marker reminding us that God has accomplished what He said he would do. That is the kind of sign God gave Moses when He told him, "This shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." God tells them what's going to happen. And when it does happen, it is a sign. When they eventually arrive back at the mountain where God first called Moses, that would be a sign to them that God accomplishes exactly what God says He will accomplish.

The sign in Isaiah 7:14 is like this last kind of sign. People will look at this child and be reminded, when he reaches a certain age, that God said something would come to pass by that time. And they

will see that it has come to pass, and they will see that God keeps His promises. But I think there is more to this child as a sign than that.

Let's start with what God said would happen. This is the clear part of the prophecy. The two kings you dread, that is Aram and Israel, Rezin and Pekah, will be forsaken. "Forsaken" is a strong term when applied to Israel. God will no longer protect Israel. That may sound sad to us, but it would sound like good news to Ahaz. Even though Ahaz did not ask for a sign, God affirms His word that Ahaz need not worry about these two stubs of a firebrand.

Unfortunately for Ahaz, he will probably give himself credit for figuring out how to deal with Aram and Israel. And God helps those who help themselves, right? Well, the second outcome is not so positive for Ahaz. The Lord will bring on Judah such days as they have not seen since the nation was torn in two. That sounds bad.

When will these outcomes come to pass? That's more difficult to say. It will happen by the time the boy is old enough to refuse evil and choose good. That sounds like a jab at Ahaz who has just chosen evil over good. Ahaz does not have the excuse of being a little toddler. But when does a little boy have the ability to refuse evil and choose good? Some would say as late as 12 or 13. You know, when they are on the verge of becoming an adult. If that is the time period, then the prophecy will have become fully true with Aram and Israel defeated by Assyria and the Assyrians having overrun the land of Judah. That will all be true in 13 years.

I have trouble believing we need to wait for 12 or 13 before a child knows how to choose between good and bad. I remember a clear incident over a plate of broccoli when my oldest daughter was 1 and a half years old. I made it very plain to her that she would be punished if she continued to throw her broccoli on the floor. She took the opportunity to stare me down. I mean, she locked eyes and held that broccoli out and dropped it. In some basic way, she knew she was choosing rebellion over submission. The 1 and a half year time frame would also work, since the initial defeat of Aram and Israel will have taken place by this point. So, depending on how you take the comment about refusing evil and choosing good we have a range of about 1 and a half to 13 years.

We also have to ask, who is the child? Some have suggested we are not talking about a particular child, but all children about to be born in Judah. They take the name "Immanuel" to be a collective. A problem with that interpretation is that it does not prove to be much of a sign to Ahaz. And the point of this faith encounter with Ahaz seems to indicate the sign will be knowable and impressive. Another suggestion is that the child will be Ahaz's child. And that seems a more likely possibility. We are concerned with the house of David. But we do not have confirmation in the immediate context and the child cannot be Ahaz's son Hezekiah, because he is already about six years old by the time of this encounter. Does a child of Ahaz fit the kind of sign that we might expect from the language?

And considering some of the language of the text, there is mystery around this child. So, the sign was to be as deep as Sheol and high as Heaven. His name was to be "Immanuel," which translates, "God with us." There is no reference to a father. He is born of a virgin. There is some mystery here.

There has been a challenge among scholars about the translation of the word, "virgin," in this text. My Croatian Bible and all my English versions say "a virgin will be with child and bear a son." My NASB does have a note beside "virgin" that says, "or maiden." That's the alternative, "a maiden will be with child and bear a son." There is another Hebrew word that specifically means "virgin." Isaiah did not use that word. He did use the word, "maiden." We have to be honest about that and not make the word mean what we want it to mean simply because we have this long tradition of translation. But I do not think that is what our modern translations are doing. Even though the word in Hebrew is "maiden," I believe the definition of the word includes "virgin." We might explain it this way. The Hebrew word used here means more than just virgin, but it does not mean less than virgin.

English used to use the word "maiden" more frequently. The word has really dropped out of our vocabulary. I think the only place we see it kind of regularly is in a wedding. We have bridesmaids, and that refers to the young women who stand around a bride at her wedding. I don't know if

anybody does this anymore, but it used to be customary to differentiate between a maid of honor and a matron of honor. She is called a “maid” if unmarried and “matron” if married. An old maid would be an older unmarried woman. The distinction still exists to a degree in Croatian. “Djevojčica” is a little girl. “Djevojka” is an unmarried young woman. And “djeвица” is a virgin. I asked a friend in preparation for this. If a young woman today of 17 or 18 years old got married, would she still be a “djevojka.” And my friend said, “No, no. She would be a ‘žena.’” When you become married, you become a “žena.” It’s a general term for “woman,” but it has an implication in that case of being a married woman.

So, though it is no longer true in much of society, in older times the word “maiden” in English, or “djevojka” in Croatian was understood to refer to a virgin, because the girl was by definition not married. You don’t use the word “maiden” or “djevojka” for a married woman. And if you were not married in those times, you were not sexually active. That’s the assumption behind the meaning of the word. And that assumption was certainly true for how Isaiah would use the language. He would not have used this word if he was speaking of a sexually active woman. He would have used the word for “wife.” Maidens do not have children. At least, not without scandal. The woman being referred to here is understood to be a virgin.

When Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 in reference to Mary, he does not use the Greek word for “maiden.” He uses the Greek word for “virgin.” That’s in Matthew 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son.” We might be a little skeptical and we might say that Matthew is knowingly changing the word to virgin to fit the Christian belief that Mary was a virgin. But what Matthew is actually doing is quoting from the Septuagint. He doesn’t really translate the Greek. He uses the accepted Greek translation of the Jewish Bible that Jews are familiar with. We are not sure exactly when the translation of Isaiah was produced. It’s likely more than a hundred years before the birth of Jesus, and it was produced by Jewish scholars. Those Jewish scholars chose to use the Greek word for “virgin” when they translated this Hebrew word, affirming the decision to continue to use the word “virgin” in our modern translations, especially if we no longer assume that maidens are virgins.

Now we have something very curious going on. This sign seems to refer both to a real child that will soon be born, and also to a much more mysterious child who has no father, who fulfills the wonder of a sign that might descend to Hell and reach to Heaven, who is born of a virgin and whose name is Immanuel. Which of these two options is primary? Is Isaiah speaking of an immediate child or a future child? What is the correct interpretation? How do we decide between the two?

I am not sure we are going to have to decide. Sometimes Hebrew prophecy includes an immediate, concrete, real fulfillment that is also symbolic of a future fulfillment. The present Immanuel might be a type of the future Immanuel. That is a possibility. We do not want to assume that in this case, just to make our interpretation job easier. We need to ask whether or not the text gives us indication that we should expect both a present and a future fulfillment of this prophecy.

I believe the text does point us in this direction. We have already considered that the baby needs to be a present sign that will soon affirm God’s word to Ahaz. and that the baby is referred to with mysterious language that points to something much more. We also have the curious reality that Isaiah mentions two more children in this prophecy to Judah, the word to Judah. The next child we encounter is a present child born to Isaiah and his wife. He is mentioned in chapter 8. And then, there is another, son of David who will reign forever, mentioned in chapter 9. I definitely lean toward interpreting the sign in 7:14 as having a dual fulfillment in these two later children. I will speak more about Isaiah’s child in a minute and will wait for our next lesson to talk about the future child.

I will say that my opinion is certainly affected by Matthew’s affirmation for us that this verse is definitely talking about Mary and Jesus. I’m not going to disagree with Matthew. And it is only affirmed when you really get into Isaiah and you’re like, “Wow! There is some stuff going on here!”

Outcome

Moving along, Ahaz was given a test that included a sign and an outcome. And just as we have needed to recognize a little bit of complexity in the sign, maybe a dual fulfillment, we also need to recognize a little bit of complexity in the outcome. God had said, “Do not fear these two regional powers. They will not overtake you.” Ahaz failed the test. He did not trust God or God’s messenger. God still planned to fulfill His word that Aram and Israel would not overcome Judah. But before giving Ahaz the sign, God had said, “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.” Ahaz’s decision made a difference. It is not now the time for Judah to be exiled like Israel. That judgment is still future. But Judah is going to suffer as a direct result of the failed spiritual leadership of Ahaz. Leadership matters. Leadership has consequences.

Isaiah explains the outcome of Ahaz’s failed faith test in the judgement of 7:18-8:8. I will read that whole passage now and then just make a few comments, since it is mostly a development of what we have already covered.

The Judgement (7:18-8:8)

<p>¹⁸ In that day that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt</p> <p>¹⁹ They will all come and settle on all the thorn bushes</p> <p>²⁰ In that day the Lord will shave</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(that is, with the king of Assyria),</p> <p>the head and the hair of the legs;</p> <p>²¹ Now in that day</p> <p>²² and because of the abundance of the milk produced for everyone that is left within the land</p> <p>²³ And it will come about in that day,</p> <p>²⁴ <i>People</i> will come there with bows and arrows</p> <p>²⁵ As for all the hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">but they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample.</p>	<p>the LORD will whistle for the fly and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, and on all the watering places. with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates and it will also remove the beard. a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; he will eat curds will eat curds and honey. that every place where there used to be a thousand vines, <i>valued</i> at a thousand <i>shekels</i> of silver, will become briars and thorns. because all the land will be briars and thorns. you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns;</p>
--	---

¹ Then the LORD said to me, “Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.” ² “And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.” ³ So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, “Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; ⁴ for before the boy knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.” ⁵ Again the LORD spoke to me further, saying, ⁶ “Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; ⁷ “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, *Even* the king of Assyria and all his glory;

<p>And it will rise up over all its channels</p> <p>⁸ “Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, And the spread of its wings</p>	<p>and go over all its banks. It will reach even to the neck; will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.</p>
--	---

Isaiah repeats the unique image from 5:26 of God whistling for an invading army to overwhelm Judah. The army would be like the flies of Egypt or the bees of Assyria coming to plague the land of Judah, swarming

up from the Nile or the Euphrates, coming to plague the land of Judah, penetrating into every place imaginable. Isaiah then switches to an image of Judah like a captive man whose hair is shaved off in dishonor. Then we get another reference to curds and honey. The first mention of curds and honey was in connection to the sign of child. That reference was positive, suggesting the luxury of a well-fed baby. Now Isaiah turns the image upside down. The land has been demolished. All a man has to eat is the milk of cows and sheep kept alive by grazing off the land and the honey he finds will be wild. This is not luxury. This is basic sustenance. It's a living off the land. Vineyards and cultivated ground will be overtaken by briars and thorns. The land of Judah has been invaded. Crops are destroyed. People are gone. It's a bit of an apocalyptic desolation.

Isaiah switches back to prose at the beginning of chapter 8 to tell us about how God commanded him to publicly display this prophetic phrase, "Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." The idea there is that very soon this powerful, quickly moving army is going to sweep in, and booty are the spoils of war, people are the prey. God instructed Isaiah to set up a placard with those words, emphasizing the speed of the coming judgment. The placard will point to two events. First, Isaiah will have a child whose name Maher-shalal-hash-baz is that phrase. That's the Hebrew for, "Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." I think I would rather have his brother's name, "a remnant will return." It's not always easy being a second child, I guess, especially if your dad is a prophet.

I believe this is the child of the sign. The clock begins to tick at the moment of his birth. The second event we expect is the actual fulfillment of the judgment. The posting of the placard is to be done in a public way such that Uriah and Zechariah, not necessarily faithful men, are able to give public witness to the fact that, "Yes, Isaiah is the one who put this up and he put it up at this time, before his wife had had the child and while Ahaz still thought he was on good terms with Assyria."

Isaiah's wife is here called a prophetess. It is not clear whether this simply indicates she is the wife of a prophet or whether she also at times prophesied. I have also read the suggestion that her birth of this particular child is an act of prophecy in that in the birth God's word is proclaimed through her.

I do realize this child does not fully fit the language given to us about the child who would be a sign. Isaiah's wife has already had one child, so she is not a maiden. Also, this child does not fit the mysterious language of up to Heaven and down to Hell that suggests something particularly spectacular. And we might say this child could not be the one since he is not named "Immanuel." And he certainly will not fulfill the concept of Immanuel like Jesus will. But to be technical, Jesus was not named "Immanuel," either. He was named "Jesus." And though this child is not going to fulfill the meaning of Immanuel as Jesus will, the phrase "God with us" also has specific application for these present circumstances. This child of Isaiah is born in a time when both names could work. We see both truths, "swift is the booty" and also "Immanuel." Judgment is coming, yet God is still with us.

Conclusion

Isaiah concludes, artfully comparing the gentle Shiloah to the mighty Euphrates. The Shiloah was a small stream that brought water into Jerusalem. Saying, "These people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah" is to say they have rejected the Lord's provision. Ahaz is looking to the might of the world. He is looking beyond God. He is despising the smallness of what God has given him. The Euphrates here is literally just called the "River," but whenever the River is mentioned in Hebrew without qualifications in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the river Euphrates. Ahaz turned from God, looking to Assyria for rescue. But that river Euphrates is a treacherous one. Once its course turns towards Israel, there is no containing its waters. After engulfing Aram and Israel,

⁷ ...it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks.
⁸ Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through,
It will reach even to the neck;
And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

This is the dual nature of the judgment. The Assyrians will overwhelm Judah like floodwaters overflowing their banks, like a bird of prey whose wings spread out over the whole breadth of the

land. The cry to Immanuel in this case sounds like a cry, either to the people of the land, or to the king of the land. It will spread its wings over your land, O Immanuel. There is some mystery here about who we are calling "Immanuel." But I think we understand the idea. God is with us. He is with us even as He judges us. And he will not let us not be completely swept away.

When we feel overwhelmed. And the floodwaters rise even up to our neck, God is with us. Even when the pain is our own fault, even when we caused the flood, God is with us. The waters do not rise up over our head. God is with us. There is hope. God is with us. O, Immanuel! God is with us!